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Atari Online News, Etc.
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->From the Editor’s Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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It’s been a rough October so far, to be sure! But, things are starting to level off again, finally. I’m still finding time to be a luxury these days, but we’ll see what happens.

It appears that the fall season has taken hold of us here in New England. Some trees are starting to turn, and it won’t be long now before we’re all buried in leaves. It’s a nice time of the year, but unfortunately, it also means that winter isn’t that far off. I guess we’ll all just have to live with that - we actually don’t have much choice, do we?!

I was going to comment further about Joe’s commentary a couple of weeks ago, but I won’t get into it much. I agree with Joe in that I feel that the U.S. should continue its space exploration program in an aggressive manner. Whether it’s beating China to the moon, or any other country, it should be done. This country has a history of being inquisitive and one that thrives on exploration. It’s time that we move forward, and well beyond our "borders" to learn more. I’ll leave it at that.

Until next time...

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AtarICQ 0.171 Is Released

Hi all,

Following the 0.170 release in June earlier this year, there is now a new aICQ release ready for download.

A good deal of small issues have been sorted out but there are a couple of additions made this time too.

You can download the new release here:

http://www.ataricq.org

Compared to the previous official release:

* A number of minor bugs sorted

* In some popup menus it was not possible to select an entry in case either contact list or msg window was also open. Fixed now.

* Fetching of contacts from the server side list had accidentally been disabled in 0.170. It works now, but this needs to be reimplemented in the future.

* Found and fixed a small bug that would result in form_wbutton() not being used under MagiC for handling of mouse clicks in background.

* AtarICQ now use AV_STARTPROG instead of VA_START when:
  1. Asking AV-SERVER to launch the Colour Selector (In Prefs./Contact list)
  2. Asking AV-SERVER to replay sound sample files
  3. Asking AV-SERVER to display history file (CTRL+H)
  4. Asking AV-SERVER to display the help file (HELP)
  (This should be good news to people who use other desktops than Thing)

* A right click on an empty place in contact list will open up the popup menu with a listing of contacts, allowing you to "Create TAB for <nick>". (Also available through CTRL+T)

* All popup menus that have window titles will now also have a CLOSER widget. Also, these popups can now also be moved like any other GEM window.

* Using TAB or UP/DOWN-ARROW to jump to next text edit field in a dialog now works better under MagiC. SHIFT+TAB will now move focus backwards. Also, when we hit the last (or first, depending on TAB-direction) editable object of the dialog, focus will not wrap back to the first (or last) editable object. (This is in fact a workaround for MagiC's limited implementation of FORM_KEYBD)

* Last AtarICQ release had a bug in the keyboard evaluation code that prevented user to type chars that required ALT-combinations. Should be OK now.

* Adapted aICQ to some server changes on the ICQ-servers, making the logging in process a tad faster, and the updating of the contact list a lot smoother during it.

Have fun, and please don't hesitate to send feedback!
I hope there are a bunch of people out there still using the program, is that so? :)

Regards,

/Joakim

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. I'm not really sure of what I'm going to talk about here yet, but I'm sure that as I ramble on, something coherent will present itself.

I just got finished watching that interview by Donnie Deutsch of Ann Coulter. You remember Donnie Deutsch, right? He did a couple of segments on THE APPRENTICE, and he's now got his own show, THE BIG IDEA. Well, I've never seen the show itself, so I can't tell you anything about it, other than he interviewed neo-conservative Ann Coulter, who was shilling her new book. I've got to tell you, I'm disgusted. I truly hope that the things she said were motivated by her wish to cause controversy and sell more books, not because she actually believes any of it. If you want to see the interview for yourself, go here: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wS9qEnmerfs . To quote Forrest Gump, That's all I have to say about that.

I just heard that Al Gore has won the Nobel Peace Prize. Good for him! Now THAT's a charmed life, huh? Winning the popular election for President of the United States AND a Nobel Prize! (The last person to do that was... anyone?... That's right... Jimmy Carter." I wonder if Gore going to wait to see if Dubya contests THIS win. Hopefully, Dubya has no relatives in Oslo.

Okay, okay, I've spread enough joy, I guess. There aren't a lot of messages on the UseNet again this week, but we're going to give it a shot.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup
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Last week, someone mentioned their TT by saying:

"My TT is great with the SuperNova VME gfx card, the CPU could do with a bit of a kick though..."

'Jan' replies:

"Yes, of course. But where can one find such an item nowadays? The last project of building one, from M. Becroft, seems to have been abandoned."

Jeff Armstrong tells Jan:

"I don't know if abandoned is the right word. I'm using a Becroft Galaxy VME card in my TT. It's a great product, but it was also expensive to make and purchase (I think i paid in excess of US$300). I think it was also a support nightmare for Mario thanks to all the "interesting" programming in Atari software. The big downside (for me, at least) was that Calamus wouldn't work with it."

Matthias Arndt asks about a good RAM test utility for his Falcon:

"Can anyone recommend a good utility that will perform an enduring test of the ST-RAM in the Falcon under TOS? Something to let run for 10 hours to verify that a memory upgrade is indeed fully working..."

Guillaume Tello tells Matthias:

"You can do it on your own... Just poke a value at a random address, then peek it back to verify if it's the same and loop!"

'Scaler' posts this just to make a good many of us feel old:

"The Atari 2600, known in the 70s as the Atari VCS ~ Video Computer System, is 30 years as of October 2007. it's birthday was actually at the start of this month, but I didn't realize it until just now. it's incredible knowing that the videogame console industry is over 30 years old."

'Impmon' tells Scaler:

"Better yet: new games are still being produced for Atari 2600. Come and check Atariage store for some games that are far better than what we had in 1970's and 1980's like Medieval Mayhem."

Rich Hutnik adds:

"Q-B is a great title (whatever it is named). It is a QBert type game that works real well on the 2600."

Well folks, that's it for this week. There WAS a rather lengthy thread about TOS being 'much better' than Mac OS, but I really don't want to get into that discussion, no matter how much I might agree with the idea, there are just too many opinions that are derogatory or mean-hearted or just plain opinion masquerading as fact. So, we'll end it here and hope there are more posts next week.

'Till then, keep your ears open so you'll hear what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - Pros Spurning Geek Stereotype!
  """""""""""""""""""""""""""""""   Gaming's Worst, Top 4?
                                    "Assassin's Creed" Soon!
                                    And more!

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Pro Gamers Spurn Geek Stereotype As Go Mainstream

Geoff Robinson does not fit the stereotype of a hardcore geek gamer. The Oregon State University student is sociable, an avid weight lifter, studies English and history - not computer science - and wants to be a high school teacher.

But Robinson, 22, is also the best American at a computer strategy game called "StarCraft: Brood War" and he is one of about 700 gamers from 74 countries competing this weekend at the World Cyber Games 2007 Grand Final in Seattle.

Organizers of the World Cyber Games said these players are athletes with tremendous hand-eye coordination who happen to be competing in "e-sports," or electronic sports.

"We'd love to see the stereotype of the geek gamer smashed," said Michael Arzt, senior vice president with the World Cyber Games. "It's not that lonely kid in the basement that people think it is."

In playing "StarCraft," Robinson estimates that a good player will do about 300 different "actions" per minute on either a keyboard or mouse and the best players can push that to 500 actions per minute.

"It's about hand speed," said Robinson, who has been playing "StarCraft" since 1998.

Well-rounded, media-friendly players like Robinson are key to moving professional video gaming to the mainstream and wider acceptance, a strategy adopted by other activities like poker and competitive eating.

Professional video gaming has not reached the mainstream in America or Europe, but it's already a closely-followed past time in South Korea where tournaments are regularly televised and the best players can make over $100,000 a year.

The transition to the mainstream is taking place all across the $30 billion video game industry. Nintendo Co. Ltd's Wii has become a huge hit by targeting people who are not hardcore gamers and Microsoft's "Halo 3" had a bigger first-day opening than any movie, book or album.

The Grand Final's format is similar to the Olympics when players compete represent their country and the goal is to win medals for the national team. They will also compete for $448,000 in cash prize money.

"The goal is to one day be recognized as on par with the Olympics or the World Cup," said Arzt.

Players compete in one of 12 games - eight computer games, four for Microsoft Corp.'s Xbox 360 - including Electronic Arts Inc.'s "FIFA 07" soccer game, Vivendi Universal Games' "WarCraft III: The Frozen Throne"

strategy game and Microsoft’s "Gears of War" shooter.

There are no overwhelming favorites to win the most medals, but the Germans are strong in FIFA and the Koreans tend to dominate the strategy games, but the host Americans are also a threat in some of the console games.

Robinson said he practices StarCraft three hours a day and kicks that up to five to six hours a day in the weeks leading up to a tournament, but his hand work doesn’t come at the expense of school, time at the gym or his social life.

"I probably lost a few hours of sleep," said Robinson. "I don’t think it ever crossed my mind to make a living playing video games, but I would like to see where this takes me."

"Assassin’s Creed" Stalks Into Stores Soon

An action-adventure game, "Assassin’s Creed," that lets players control a Crusades-era hitman stalking and killing his targets, is gearing up to be one of the biggest titles this holiday.

With "Halo 3" now in stores, players and developers alike are keeping a close eye on November, the month during which Ubisoft’s "Assassin’s Creed" and some of its biggest competitors will hit the shelves.

The game, which will be available for the Xbox 360, the PlayStation 3 and the PC, is generating lots of buzz.

Video game Web site IGN.com counts it among "our most anticipated games of 2007." A trailer released in May was downloaded more than 1.3 million times in less than a week.

Ubisoft invested in realism for the game, and it shows.

Beautifully rendered visions of cities like Jerusalem and Damascus circa 1191 are no accident. The company hired an Oxford historian to help with detail and brought in a consultant who worked on the film "Kingdom of Heaven," which was set during the same historical period.

The game takes place as the Third Crusade rolls across the Holy Land. The player takes on the role of Altair, an assassin tasked with taking out targets on both sides of the conflict with a mixture of acrobatics and swashbuckling skill.

"But there’s also kind of this hidden sci-fi aspect to it which they (Ubisoft) have been playing very, very close to the vest," says Jeff Haynes, PlayStation editor at IGN.com.

Ubisoft has kept quiet about the futuristic touches, like the symbols that envelop some characters.

The developers also spent a lot of time making the crowds in the game interactive and often crucial to success.

"We wanted to create a crowd that not only was believable, - living and breathing and did things that were interesting - but also created

gameplay," Jade Raymond, the producer on Assassin’s Creed, said in an interview.

This has the potential to lead to unique and unpredictable scenarios and that, combined with the promise of a deep plot, has anticipation running high.

Raymond admits trying to live up to the hype can be intimidating.

"I was pretty worried for a while, to tell you the truth, just because you never know," she said. However, after presenting a near-final version of the game to testers and game media, she said the response has been universally positive.

"So that’s reassured me a little bit," she said.

IGN.com’s Haynes said there were some concerns earlier this year about the controls but these have improved since then.

"I think it’s still one of the bigger titles," he said of the game. "I have a feeling that it’s going to be one those games that will probably wind up surprising people, especially when they get their hands on it."

’Spider-Man: Friend Or Foe’ Is Good, Simple Fun

If you launch the latest Spider-Man video game expecting a comic book-inspired brawler for younger players, you won’t be disappointed with this superhero adventure. But those in search of a deep story, open-ended environments or high-definition graphics should swing past this title.

As its name suggests, Spider-Man: Friend or Foe lets you not only play as the webbed wonder but also choose a sidekick from one of a dozen villains as they team up to fight a greater evil. Each with their own unique fighting technique and super powers, sidekicks include Doctor Octopus ("Doc Ock"), Venom, Rhino and Green Goblin, all of whom need to be first defeated before they’ll fight alongside you.

While playing alone, you control one character, while the game’s artificial intelligence handles the other. For example, while fighting baddies as Spider-Man, the computer will control, say, Sandman, but you can switch at any time by pressing a button on the game pad. The game’s mechanics also allow the two characters to work together at times, such as bypassing traps (by each character stepping on pressure plates at the same time) or defeating a bigger "boss" enemy by taking advantage of each character’s skills. If you want to replay a level - be it in a high-tech laboratory, on the sandy streets of Egypt, along city rooftops or throughout a creepy Transylvania - you can swap out the current sidekick for a newly unlocked one from the main game screen. This adds to the game’s replayability.

Another welcome feature in Spider-Man: Friend or Foe is built-in cooperative play. At any time, a friend can pick up a second controller on the game system and take control of the second hero or villain.

Played from a third-person perspective - and in classic "platformer" style, the action tends to move from the left side of the screen to the right - you will have fun "button mashing" to defeat the enemies.

Influenced by the game’s comic book origins, the characters and environments are colorful and bright. The animation is smooth, so you will enjoy pulling off slick moves, such as using Spidey’s web to pull items toward him, or using aerial acrobatics during combat sequences.

Skilled gamers will be rewarded with special unlockable characters, including the black-suited Spider-Man from the last motion picture, as well as special behind-the-scenes material accessible at anytime throughout the game, such as movies, character art and more. A "Versus" mode lets you fight in a number of arenas.

Perfect for younger players who want a fairly straightforward fighting game but with plenty of replayability, Spider-Man: Friend or Foe is an enjoyable twist on the popular franchise.

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->A-ONE Gaming Online - Online Users Growl & Purr!
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Top 4 List: Worst Video Games

*1. E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial (Atari 2600): Rush-released for the holidays to capitalize on the success of Steven Spielberg’s magical movie, this jaw-dropping stinker isn’t just the worst game ever; it defines what a bad game truly is. The slow, choppy gameplay consists mostly of a green, pixilated E.T. climbing out of pits, dodging an awkwardly programmed detective, and ... getting out of more pits. E.T. himself would trade in stashes of Reese’s Pieces to ensure no curious gamer touches this monstrosity.

*2. Survival Arts (Arcade): When "Mortal Kombat" revolutionized fighting games, piles of imitators followed, but none as bad as this. From the cheap, garish costumes and overly dramatic death cries to the horrible controls and character actors, "Survival Arts" will make one burst into fits of laughter with its ineptitude. Did I mention the old guy with a limitless supply of weapons and the boss who looks like Richard Simmons?

*3. Superman 64 (Nintendo 64): People love Superman because he represents absolute good and can do no wrong - except when he flies on your home console. This N64 turkey defaces the good name of Superman in every way, forcing the Man of Steel to fly through hoops as a mission. The gameplay is extremely buggy, with unresponsive controls and limited superpowers. You may find yourself giving up when Lex Luthor challenges, "Solve my maze." Difficult, as there is no maze.

*4. Gods and Generals (PC): A tie-in for a hated Civil War movie that can’t get basic game programming right. The low artificial intelligence has soldiers shooting randomly and running through fire until they die; the landscaping has more polygons than a geometry book; there are hardly any game physics; and nearly every troop looks exactly the same. Had the Civil War itself been like this game, it’d probably be known as the Clone Wars long before George Lucas made movies - if either side even

won.

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A-ONE’s Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

House Approves Four-Year Extension of Net Tax Ban

The House Judiciary Committee voted Wednesday to extend a moratorium on state and local taxes on Internet access. The committee approved an amendment to the Internet Tax Freedom Act, offered by Rep. John Conyers Jr. (D-Mich.), to extend the ban four years, until November 1, 2011.

Under the ban, originally passed in 1998 and extended in 2004, the law prevents local governments from taxing "a service that enables users to access content, information, electronic mail, or other services offered over the Internet."

While the White House, Republicans, and tech-state Democrats pushed for making the ban permanent, the committee struck a compromise position, accommodating the concerns of local governments that fear that once they are permanently banned from collecting taxes, cable and telecom operators will try to add telephony, TV, and other currently taxable services.

Rep. Bob Goodlatte, a Virginia Republican who is a leader on high-tech issues, called on the committee to allow the full House to vote on a permanent Internet tax ban "so that the Internet will continue to thrive and so that access to the Internet does not become limited to wealthy Americans in urban areas."

But Conyers, who said his amendment is supported by the Don’t Tax Our Web coalition and the National Governor’s Association, said the compromise would "provide much-needed clarity to the communications and Internet industries, while addressing the needs of states and local governments."

"I truly believe this four-year extension is the absolutely best way to get this measure to the floor and signed into law by November 1," Conyers said.

The National Governor’s Association said the amendment not only offers a reasonable, limited extension of the ban but also closes a loophole "that puts state revenues at risk" and grandfathers protection for existing revenue. The limited extension is important, the governors said, "to ensure that Congress revisit the moratorium to review any unintended consequences for consumers, industry, or the states."

The Don’t Tax Our Web coalition, comprised of technology, cable, and telecom companies, had been supporting a permanent ban on Internet-access taxes. "Taxes that impede consumer demand for access and inconsistent application of state taxes on new technologies are a roadblock to ... new investments," the group says on its Web site.

Addressing state concerns, the Conyers amendment allows nine states to continue their existing Internet-access taxes and clarifies that the tax moratorium is on Internet access, not services such as VoIP.

Time is running short, though. While the current moratorium expires on November 1, Democrats have yet to schedule a floor vote on the bill and the Senate Commerce Committee hasn't taken up the issue since it tabled a bill last month after members were unable to reach a compromise on whether the extension should be temporary or permanent.

In addition, Congress has more pressing items on its agenda, notably a rewrite of legislation allowing the government to spy on foreign targets on U.S. soil under a blanket warrant. That bill is expected to go to the House floor next week, potentially pushing a vote on Internet taxes beyond the November 1 deadline.

Gateway Plans to Buy Packard Bell

Gateway Inc. on Monday announced plans to acquire PC vendor Packard Bell BV for an undisclosed amount, a move funded by Acer Inc. as part of its planned acquisition of Gateway.

Gateway delivered a binding offer to purchase all of John Hui's shares in PB Holdings Co. SARL, Packard Bell's parent company. Hui is Packard Bell's largest shareholder.

Acer announced its plans to buy Gateway in late August for US$710 million.

In 2006, Gateway signed an agreement with Hui that gave Gateway the right of first refusal if he decided to sell PB Holding Co. At the time, if Paris-based Packard Bell wanted to enter into a final agreement to be purchased by a third party, the company had to ask Gateway first. Gateway could then move into the first position to enter purchase talks with Packard Bell.

Hui also sold the privately held eMachines to Gateway in 2004.

The acquisition will be a blow to Lenovo Group Ltd., which in early August revealed it was in discussions with Packard Bell over a possible acquisition.

The deal is anticipated to close later this year or in the first quarter of 2008, Gateway said.

Blazingly Fast Internet2 Gets 10x Boost

The ultrahigh-speed Internet2 network just got 10 times faster, partly in anticipation of rising demand for capacity after the world's largest particle collider opens near Geneva next year.

Until recently, the Internet2 had a theoretical limit of 10 gigabits per second, which is thousands of times faster than standard home broadband

connections. By sending data using 10 different colors, or wavelengths, of light over a single cable, operators are boosting the network's capacity to 100 Gbps.

That means a high-quality version of the movie "The Matrix" could be sent in a few seconds rather than half a minute over the old Internet2 and several hours over a typical home broadband line.

The new Internet2 network was largely completed in late August, and its operators this week made it possible for researchers to temporarily grab an entire 10 Gbps chunk for specific applications, so that they don't slow down normal Internet operations.

"It's now possible for a single computer to have a 10 gigabit connection and we needed to have a way of making sure that those kinds of demanding applications could be served at the same time as all the normal uses," Doug Van Houweling, Internet2's chief executive, said Wednesday.

The Internet2 network, run by Level 3 Communications Inc., parallels the regular Internet to let universities, corporations and researchers share large amounts of information in real time.

An institution typically has one 10 Gbps connection to the 100 Gbps Internet2 backbone for normal Internet usage, along with a second 10 Gbps connection it can tap on demand for specific needs, Van Houweling said.

Physicists will likely be among the first to use that on-demand capability, Van Houweling said, when the $1.8 billion Large Hadron Collider at the European Organization for Nuclear Research begins operations, now scheduled for May.

"There will be thousands of physicists who will all need to access the data coming out of the LHC," he said.

Astronomers, meanwhile, might one day use the faster network to link distant radio telescopes to get a clearer picture of the sky in real time, Van Houweling said.

Internet2 already is planning future expansion. By adding certain equipment, Van Houweling said, the network can easily boost capacity another fourfold to 400 Gbps - something likely to begin in 12 to 18 months.

Hybrid Hard Drive Works Without Windows

New FlashMate hybrid hard drive technology has been introduced that allows data to be read, even when the computer is switched off.

This enables notebook users to access content on the hard disk drive, without having to power on the computer, in order for example to listen to MP3 files, view digital pictures, access email, etc.

The technology has been developed by SST (Silicon Storage Technology), a flash memory technology business, and Insyde Software, a provider of UEFI-based firmware, BIOS and engineering services.

FlashMate combines hardware, firmware and software in a system application

subsystem that manages a notebook computer’s hard drive. It is based on SST’s expertise in NAND flash controllers and memory subsystem design with Insyde Software’s expertise in PC BIOS, system software and power management.

FlashMate can work in conjunction with features such as Windows Vista ReadyDrive and serve as nonvolatile cache for the hard disk drive, thus enabling a standard hard disk drive to function as a hybrid drive.

Hybrid drives feature a hard disk drive accompanied by a NAND flash drive acting as a data cache. By using the NAND flash memory buffer when the system is active, the notebook’s hard drive is rarely engaged, leading to better hard drive reliability, reduced power consumption, increased performance, and faster boot and resume times.

FlashMate does more by giving notebook users the ability to access to hard disk data and various applications via the notebook’s USB interface, without actually having to engage the CPU.

Bing Yeh, SST’s president and CEO, said: "Current hybrid-drive products available on the market, either as nonvolatile cache embedded in the hard disk drive or integrated on the motherboard, have enhanced some of the capabilities of notebook computers, but these solutions only scratch the surface of what is possible."

"Our FlashMate technology expands beyond hybrid-drive functionality by enabling notebook users to conveniently perform tasks without having to turn on the computer, such as transferring files from an external memory, getting contact information from an Outlook address book, listening to MP3 music or checking flight arrival times."

This provides faster and more convenient access to data because the notebook computer does not have to go through a lengthy boot process.

The first series of products featuring FlashMate technology are scheduled to be available from SST in the second quarter of 2008. The two companies are working with notebook computer manufacturers to have FlashMate technology designed into their products as an embedded application.

Google Vows To Increase Gmail Storage Limit

People using Google’s Gmail service are sucking up storage space faster than the company can add it.

Google said on Friday it is speeding up the rate at which it adds storage space for its Gmail Web-based e-mail service due to the increased storage requirements for attachments such as photos.

"A few of you are using Gmail so much that you’re running out of space, so to make good on our promise, today we’re announcing we are speeding up our counter and giving out more free storage," wrote Rob Siemborski, a Google engineer on the Gmail blog.

On Friday, the counter on the Gmail login page stood at more than 2,935MB, or about 2.9GB, of storage, and was rising - but the counter is an illustration rather than a hard limit.

Google started gradually increasing Gmail storage in April 2005 when the service turned one year old. Google's Gmail gained immediately popularity when it launched in 2004, offering free accounts with 1GB of storage, but this year has been surpassed by its rivals.

Microsoft upped its free storage limit for its Windows Live Hotmail service to 5GB in August, and Yahoo started offered "unlimited" storage in May.

Can E-Mail Authentication Stop Phishing?

What do you get when Yahoo, eBay, and PayPal join forces against malware? A collaborative effort to help protect consumers against fraudulent e-mails and dangerous scams commonly called phishing attacks.

A movement got underway on Thursday that gives eBay and PayPal customers who use Yahoo Mail an upper hand against fraudsters by blocking fake e-mails that claim to be coming from these popular online properties.

Michael Barrett, chief information security officer at PayPal, called it an aggressive move and a significant step in the fight to protect consumers against e-mail-based crimes. "While there is clearly no silver bullet for solving the problems of phishing and identity theft," he said, "[the] announcement is great news for our customers who rely on Yahoo Mail."

Yahoo's Domain Keys technology is designed to verify the authenticity of e-mail messages, allowing ISPs to determine whether messages are real and should be delivered to a customer's inbox. Yahoo developed Domain Keys, which uses cryptographic keys, to address the widespread issue of e-mail forgery.

Essentially, the Domain Keys technology allows e-mail providers to validate an e-mail's originating domain, making use of blacklists and whitelists more effective. It also makes phishing attacks easier to detect by helping to identify abusive domains. In May 2007, the Internet Engineering Task Force approved Domain Keys as a proposed Internet standard.

Domain Keys is seeing terrific industry adoption, in part due to the widespread consensus about its potential as an Internet standard, according to Nicki Dugan, Yahoo's blog editor.

"About 40 percent of the e-mail we deliver on Yahoo Mail is signed with Domain Keys," Dugan wrote in a recent blob. "And we hope [this] news gets the attention of information security officers at some of the more obvious phishing targets so we can help protect even more consumers from the havoc these scams wreak."

Andrew Braunberg, a research director for the Enterprise Software and Security group at Current Analysis, said Domain Keys is a good approach to authentication as it flows in the same vein of the movement in other markets, especially financial services, toward risk-based authentication.

But Braunberg said companies have to consider the level of authentication that is appropriate to the communication. "There is always some overhead associated with any security technology," he said. "There's always a

trade-off between productivity and security, or access and security."

Braunberg pointed out that you don’t want to make people jump through six hoops every time they want to open Outlook. "It doesn’t make sense," he said. "It’s got to be a more rationalized, prioritized approach to defining security requirements. That’s where the market is moving."

While the Domain Keys method might sound like an ideal solution to the problem of phishing and spam, because it works automatically in the background so that users never see the e-mail that is identified as fraudulent, it is of limited usefulness unless a majority of e-mail providers back it.

Hacker Breaks Into eBay Server, Locks Out Users

A malicious hacker broke into an eBay server on Friday and temporarily suspended the accounts of a "very small" number of members, the company said.

"We were able to block the fraudster quickly before any permanent damage had been done. At no point did the fraudster get any access to financial information or other sensitive information," eBay spokeswoman Nichola Sharpe said via e-mail.

eBay has "secured and restored" the affected accounts and is calling the affected users, she said, without specifying how many accounts the hacker accessed and tinkered with.

"The fraudster did this by accessing externally visible servers, not by hacking into the eBay site," Sharpe said.

She didn’t immediately reply to follow-up questions from IDG News Service seeking clarification on what is an "externally visible" server and how it’s different from an eBay site server.

eBay faces attacks to compromise its systems "every day," Sharpe said. "After learning of the recent situation, we quickly reacted to it," she said.

"As we continue to lock down on the traditional ways that bad guys have attempted to exploit our system, it is only natural that they will look for new ways to get in. It is an ongoing battle," she said.

The incident, first reported by e-commerce news site AuctionBytes, happened a little more than a week after someone used an eBay discussion forum to post confidential information about eBay users.

The previous incident led the e-commerce giant to shut down the forum, one that ironically was devoted to the discussion of security issues.

The perpetrator of that confidential data disclosure posted the names and contact information of 1,200 eBay members on the company’s Trust & Safety discussion forum, along with credit card numbers that were later determined to be invalid.

eBay eventually concluded that the attacker obtained the information via a phishing scheme, tricking individual members into disclosing the data.

Friday’s hack has quite a few eBay members rattled, judging by this long discussion forum thread about the incident.

In that thread, some affected eBay members report receiving e-mails from a hacker identified as Vladuz saying that he had targeted them for posting forum comments that were critical of him.

Vladuz has in the past reportedly stolen login information that has allowed him to post messages to eBay discussion forums as if he were an eBay employee.

In its article, AuctionBytes said Vladuz has been targeting eBay for about 10 months.

Sharpe didn’t immediately reply to the question whether eBay knows who was behind Friday’s attack.

Reported Assassination Of Russian Spammer Deemed A Hoax

The reported assassination of an alleged Russian spammer is a hoax, according to security researchers.

On Thursday, a blog post on the Web site Loonov.com claimed a spammer named Alexey Tolstokozhev was found murdered in a villa outside Moscow. "He has been shot several times with one bullet stuck in his head. According to authorities, this last head shot is a clear mark of Russian hit men," the post said.

The reported assassination of Tolstokozhev echoed the 2005 murder of an actual Russian spammer, Vardan Kushnir. Kushnir was found beaten to death in a Moscow apartment, prompting speculation his murder was related to his activities as a spammer. However, a police investigation later said Kushnir was killed by robbers and his death was not connected with his spam activities.

The Tolstokozhev story caught the attention of the security community as well as blogs, even making it on to Slashdot, one of the most popular sites for technology-related news. But security researchers soon debunked the report.

The story began to unravel when researchers failed to locate Tolstokozhev in records of known spammers, even though Loonov.com claimed he was responsible for "up to 30 percent of all Viagra and penis enlargement-related spam" and made more than $2 million in 2007 from these unsolicited e-mails. More questions were raised when researchers discovered that the Loonov.com domain name was registered on the same day the assassination post appeared.

"We got the feeling pretty quickly that it was a hoax," said Dave Marcus, security research and communications manager at McAfee’s Avert Labs. "It just became obvious that either this was somebody’s idea of a joke or they were using a real person’s name and trying to associate him with being a spammer."

Other security researchers picked up on the hoax as well, with reports appearing on Sunbelt Software’s SunbeltBlog and Taint.org, a blog written

by Justin Mason, a software developer in Ireland.

The motivation behind the Tolstokozhev hoax is not clear. The Loonov.com domain was registered anonymously and the identity of the person behind the hoax is not known.

"It’s probably just an attempt to besmirch this person’s name, because this guy’s name does not appear on the list of usual suspects," Marcus said.

Avert Labs and other researchers looked into whether there was a malicious side to the Loonov.com site, such as downloading malware onto a visitor’s computer, but didn’t find anything suspicious. "As of now, we haven’t found any malicious code embedded in the site," he said.

Perhaps ironically, all of the attention that’s been given to the Tolstokozhev story may eventually turn Loonov.com into a spam site.

"He’s getting an awful lot of traffic being driven to the site because of all the attention he’s getting. He’ll get a lot of Google juice out of this," Marcus said, referring to the way Google’s search engine ranks Web sites. "If you use it as a spam site, you’ve already got good Google activity built up, but that’s just a guess."

EU Privacy Body To Take Months On Google Probe

The European Union’s data watchdog will take another few months to decide whether Google Inc or other Web search engines may be violating EU privacy laws, a participant in the watchdog’s meeting said on Wednesday.

The EU body, made up of national protection supervisors of the bloc’s 27 member states, said earlier this year that Google seemed to be failing to respect EU privacy and expanded its investigation in June to other Web search engines.

"We have written to Google to say that we are continuing our work, that it is not limited to Google, and that we will adopt an opinion at the beginning of 2008," the official said after the so-called Article 29 Committee met on Wednesday.

"We want to adopt a comprehensive opinion, saying how long they can keep data, and which ones," the official said.

When users carry out searches, Google gathers information about their tastes, interests and beliefs that could potentially be used by third parties, such as advertisers, but the company says it never passes on the data.

Google wrote to the EU data watchdog in June saying the company was ready to curtail the time it stored user data to a year and a half.

That storage time was the low end of an 18- to 24-month period it had originally proposed to regulators in March.

The best-known search providers include Google, Yahoo Inc, Microsoft Corp’s Live Search and Ask.com, which is owned by IAC/InterActiveCorp.

The watchdog advises the EU on privacy rules. It has no legal power and its opinions are not binding.

Disabled Less Likely To Be Online

Americans with disabilities and other chronic conditions are less likely to use the Internet, but those who are online are among the most avid consumers of health-related information, a new study finds.

Half of those with chronic conditions use the Internet, compared with three-quarters of those without, the Pew Internet and American Life Project said Monday.

That's partly because those with chronic conditions tend to be older and less educated, two factors linked with lower Internet usage overall, said Susannah Fox, an associate director at Pew and the study's main author. Other barriers include difficulties navigating the Web for those with, say, poor vision or motion control.

But when they are online, those with chronic conditions are more apt to seek health information online - at least for some tasks.

"It's an indication of what could happen in the future if there were more universal access to the Internet," Fox said. "This population is just as likely as anyone else to take advantage of the technology's promises."

The telephone study of 2,928 American adults was conducted in August 2006 and has a margin of sampling error of plus or minus 2 percentage points. Results based on the 268 Internet users with chronic conditions have an error margin of plus or minus 7 percentage points.

Pew said 86 percent of Internet users with chronic conditions have looked online for information on at least one of 17 health topics, compared with 79 percent of those without such conditions. The difference, however, falls within the error margin.

The study found the chronic population far more likely to look for information about medication, specific treatments and procedures and alternative treatments and medicines - all by margins exceeding the potential sampling error.

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